Counterinsurgency:
Clear-Hold-Build and the Pashtun Tribes in Afghanistan

A Monograph

by

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13. ABSTRACT *(Maximum 200 Words)*

This monograph examines alternative approaches to U.S. COIN operations in the eastern Pashtun tribal areas in Afghanistan that are sensitive to and inclusive of the key elements of the Pashtun code of Pashtunwali. The author reviews Pashtuns and their code of conduct, Pashtunwali, to explain how Pashtuns live and interact within their environment in Afghanistan. This review provides a historical perspective and context for an examination of U.S. operations from 2007 to 2009 in the eastern Pashtun tribal areas, focusing on the provinces of Kunar and Nuristan. Two alternative approaches, one which focuses on engaging tribes individually and one which focuses on the development of governance at the district level, are also evaluated to determine if the respective approaches offer a better way to accomplish the stated objectives of the clear-hold-build approach and the underlying supporting tasks. Research revealed that U.S. COIN operations do not effectively engage Pashtuns because the clear-hold-build approach as applied is not sensitive to or inclusive of key elements of Pashtunwali. Both alternative approaches are sensitive to and inclusive of Pashtuns and Pashtunwali and because of this are more likely to yield positive results in a COIN environment in Afghanistan.

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Abstract

COUNTERINSURGENCY: CLEAR-HOLD-BUILD AND THE PASHTUN TRIBES IN AFGHANISTAN by Major John M. Auten III, U.S. Army, 51 pages.

This monograph examines alternative approaches to U.S. COIN operations in the eastern Pashtun tribal areas in Afghanistan that are sensitive to and inclusive of the key elements of the Pashtun code of *Pashtunwali*. The author reviews Pashtuns and their code of conduct, *Pashtunwali*, to explain how Pashtuns live and interact within their environment in Afghanistan. This review provides a historical perspective and context for an examination of U.S. operations from 2007 to 2009 in the eastern Pashtun tribal areas, focusing on the provinces of Kunar and Nuristan.

Two alternative approaches, one which focuses on engaging tribes individually and one which focuses on the development of governance at the district level, are also evaluated to determine if the respective approaches offer a better way to accomplish the stated objectives of the clear-hold-build approach and the underlying supporting tasks. Research revealed that U.S. COIN operations do not effectively engage Pashtuns because the clear-hold-build approach as applied is not sensitive to or inclusive of key elements of *Pashtunwali*. Both alternative approaches are sensitive to and inclusive of Pashtuns and *Pashtunwali* and because of this are more likely to yield positive results in a COIN environment in Afghanistan.

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Acronyms

ANA	Afghan National Army
ANP	Afghan National Police
AO	Area of Operations
ASF	Afghan Security Forces
BCT	Brigade Combat Team
CCA	Close Combat Attack
COIN	Counterinsurgency
DDT	District Development Team
GIRoA	Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
ISAF	International Security Assistance Forces
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team
RC-East	Regional Command-East
TES	Tribal Engagement Strategy
TET	Tribal Engagement Team
U.S.	United States

Illustrations

Introduction

Background

Afghanistan has long been a battleground for the great powers of the world. Greeks, Romans, Huns, Mongols, Persians, and Americans have all fought on its soil.[1] In the face of such invasions the people of Afghanistan have always resisted. "They [Afghans] present the same problems to foreign antagonists today as they did 2,500 years ago."[2] The greatest resistance to these foreign invaders has always come from the tribes of Afghanistan.

Away from the cities of Kabul and Kandahar lie vast mountainous regions that are home to the tribes. They include Pashtuns, Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazaras.[3] In these remote areas, the tribes have been able to fend off the influence of foreign invaders as well as centralized rule from within. Only for one brief period has Afghanistan been under the control of a central government. From 1880 to 1901, Amir Abdur Rahman Khan, controlled the country by "building towers of skulls from the heads of all who opposed him."[4] Outside of this twenty-year period, the tribes of Afghanistan have enjoyed relative freedom to live "unbothered by government at all."[5]

Pashtuns are the most numerous of the Afghan tribes, residing primarily in the east along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, and continuing south along the border to Kandahar. "Their history, values, customs, attitudes, loyalties, anomalies, and greed–when combined with conflicts

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[1] Jonah Blank, "Invading Afghanistan, Then and Now," *Foreign Affairs* September/October, (2011).

[2] Stephen Tanner, *Afghanistan: A Military History of Afghanistan from Alexander the Great to the War against the Taliban* (Philadelphia, PA: Da Capo Press, 2002), 1.

[3] Louis Dupree, *Afghanistan* (Princeton, N.J.,: Princeton University Press, 1973), 61-62.

[4] Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason, "All Counterinsurgency Is Local," *The Atlantic*, no. October (2008). http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2008/10/all-counterinsurgency-is-local/6965/ (accessed 20 March 2012).

[5] Tanner, 3.

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between and within tribes have resulted in the development of similar attributes within the other

ethnic groups to make Afghanistan one of the most unruly 'nations' on the face of the planet."[6]

Pashtuns and their code of *Pashtunwali* or literally "the way of Pashtuns," has kept them as the

dominant tribal force on the landscape for over 2,000 years.[7] More than any other tribe, the

Pashtuns have helped Afghanistan earn its reputation as the "Graveyard of Empires"[8] and have

left many foreign invaders "wishing they had studied Pashtun tribal dynamics long before

entering the game."[9]

Purpose

The purpose of this monograph is to examine alternative approaches to U.S. COIN

operations in the eastern Pashtun tribal areas in Afghanistan that are sensitive to and inclusive of

the key elements of the Pashtun code of *Pashtunwali*. The research question posed is: do U.S.

COIN operations using the clear-hold-build approach effectively engage Afghan tribes? Research

revealed that U.S. COIN operations do not effectively engage Pashtuns because the clear-hold-

build approach as applied is not sensitive to or inclusive of key elements of *Pashtunwali.* Two

alternative approaches are identified, one which focuses on engaging tribes individually and one

which focuses on the development of governance at the district level. Both approaches are

evaluated for their ability to satisfy the objectives of the clear-hold-build approach and offer a

better way to accomplish the stated objectives and the underlying supporting tasks. Both

approaches are viable because they rely on existing tribal societal structures that are capable of

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[6]Tribal Analysis Center, "Pashtun Tribal Dynamics," 2009, http://www.tribalanalysis center.com/Research-Completed.html (accessed 11 April 2012), 1.

[7]Afghanland.com, "Pashtunwali", http://afghanland.com/culture/pashtunwali.html (accessed 23 March 2012).

[8]Seth G. Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires : America's War in Afghanistan*, 1st ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2009), 5.

[9]Tribal Analysis Center, 1.

providing security and governance, while limiting the direct involvement of the Afghan central government in tribal affairs.

Importance

In the last ten years, COIN has been the dominant form of warfare experienced by U.S. forces. As enemies sought to avoid the conventional fighting advantage possessed by U.S. forces, insurgent warfare will likely continue to be one of the choices selected by U.S. adversaries. Understanding where COIN has been successful and where it has failed to achieve its goals is important for future U.S. counterinsurgent efforts.

Failure is rich with lessons learned, U.S. Army COIN doctrine encourages "counterinsurgents to develop the ability to learn and adapt rapidly and continuously."[10] Learning how to interact with indigenous people, in this case, Pashtun tribes is critical for success. U.S. forces, using clear-hold-build approach to COIN, failed to understand honor, revenge, and the role of the *jirga* as a mechanism of local governance, within the Pashtun tribes in eastern Afghanistan. Failure to understand these elements, which are central in the Pashtun way of life, caused Pashtuns to resist U.S. COIN efforts which resulted in an inability to achieve their mission.

Methodology

To support this thesis, the author reviewed Pashtuns and their code of conduct, *Pashtunwali*, to explain how Pashtuns live and interact within their environment in Afghanistan. This review provided a historical perspective and context for an examination of U.S. operations from 2007 to 2009 in the eastern Pashtun tribal areas, focusing on the provinces of Kunar and Nuristan. These operations were evaluated for their ability to achieve the stated objectives of the

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[10]U.S. Department of the Army, *Field Manual 3-24: Counterinsurgency* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, December 2006), 1-29.

clear-hold-build approach and to accomplish the underlying supporting tasks. U.S. operations were in conflict with key elements of *Pashtunwali*. Combat operations caused civilian casualties and killed Taliban fighters who were guests of the Pashtuns. These killings violated Pashtun precepts of honor, which is commonly redressed by seeking revenge. U.S. forces also sought to introduce influence of the Afghan central government, which was viewed as an affront to the *jirga*, or local council of elders. Attempting to supplant the *jirga* also violated *seyal*, or the individual's right to select members of the *jirga*.

Two alternative approaches, one which focused on engaging tribes individually and one which focused on the development of governance at the district level, were also evaluated to determine if the respective approaches offered a better way to accomplish the stated objectives of the clear-hold-build approach and the underlying supporting tasks.

Organization

The first subsection provided an examination of Pashtun tribes, their organization, their code of *Pashtunwali*, and its underlying elements of honor, revenge, hospitality, and tribal governance, that are most important in the context of COIN operations. The second subsection provided an account of U.S. COIN operations and how those operations were unsuccessful in fully implementing the clear-hold-build approach in tribal areas in Kunar and Nuristan. Subsection three examined two alternative approaches, each proposed by U.S. Special Forces officers with experience in Afghanistan. The first approach proposed engaging individual Pashtun tribes in Afghanistan with small teams of U.S. forces to achieve the goals of the clear-hold-build approach. The second approach focused on building the capacity of the district level of government in Afghanistan in order to link the Pashtun tribes to the central government. This approach also sought to achieve the goals of the clear-hold-build approach.

The Pashtuns and Pashtunwali

Tribe

It is important to understand what a tribe is in the context of Afghanistan. Bernt Glatzer defined tribe in the context of Afghanistan as, "a social segment based on a genealogical concept of social structure."[11] Another common definition of tribe is "a form of social organization based on kinship and locality."[12] The two essential elements underlying the definition are that a tribe's formation is social in origin, and that members identify with one another based on personal relationships of blood or marriage. It is important to understand that when an Afghan Pashtun identifies himself by tribe, he may be identifying himself with a group of people beyond blood relation. It is incumbent on the inquisitor to ask questions that clarify the relationship so a complete understanding of tribe is discerned. Failure to do so may leave an incomplete picture of the underlying ethnicity, village, or extended family.

Tribe is a western adaptation of the Arabic word *qawm*.[13] *Qawm* "defines an individual's identity in his social world."[14] Although they are nearly analogous, *qawm* can include people who group together for political and religious reasons.[15] It can also include members of a group who act as if they are blood relatives, even if there is no actual biological relationship between the members. Understanding tribes is key to understanding Afghanistan.

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[11]Bernt Glatzer, *The Pashtun Tribal System*, ed. In G. Pfeffer and D. K. Behera, Contemporary Society: Tribal Studies, vol. 5 (New Delhi: Concept Publishers, 2002), 2.

[12]Arturo G. Munoz, "Pashtun Tribalism and Ethnic Nationalism," (2010) (accessed 15 September 2011).

[13]Glatzer, 1. It is also expressed as *qam, qabila, 'il,* or *tayfah.*

[14]Peter R. Blood, *Afghanistan: A Country Study*2001.

[15]Ibid.

The last census conducted in Afghanistan was in 1979.[16] Pashtuns made up more than 50 percent of the total population, outnumbering the next largest ethnic group, Tajiks, two-to-one.[17] Most scholars agree that this ratio has not changed appreciably in the last thirty years. Pashtuns live by the tribal code of conduct or *Pashtunwali*. There is a high degree of certainty that any Pashtun tribe encountered will live by all or some portion of this code. It is instructive to understand this code in some detail because it is the underpinning for tribal organization amongst the Pashtun majority in Afghanistan.

> The Pashtun code of conduct is based on equality (Seyal) and applying equality is called (Seyali or competition). Equality, competition, protection of Namus (protection of female members and wealth) and Ezzat (honor) are the centerpieces of *Pashtunwali*. Other components of *Pashtunwali* are Gundi (rivalry); Qawm (ethnicity or tribe) or Qawmi Taroon (tribal binding); protection of Hamsaya (neighbor or outsiders living with a family or in a village); Jirga (meeting of elders to gather for a specific issue to solve); Pur, Ghach, Enteqam or Badal (revenge) and Nanawati (forgiveness). The application of these rules is called Narkh (informal or traditional law or rules), the implementation of which is being the responsibility of a Jirga, Shura or government.[18]

This system defines social relationships, promotes social security, settles disputes, and provides a cultural identity for its members. It is a simple way of life that can appear utterly complex to an outsider. Understanding the key pillars of *Pashtunwali* in detail informs the counterinsurgent in the conduct of counterinsurgency operations.

Honor

Honor or *ezzat* is one of the most critical elements in *Pashtunwali*. In order to gain and maintain honor, an Afghan must protect the female members of the family, his land, and his property. Failure to do so may result in shame, and loss of stature in family, village, or greater

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[16]Afghanistan's Website, "Population," http://www.afghanistans.com/information/people/population.htm (accessed 2 December 2011).

[17]Anwar-ul-Haq Ahady, "The Decline of the Pashtuns in Afghanistan," *Asian Survey* 35, no. 7 (July 1995): 621.

[18]Shahmahmood Miakhel, "The Importance of Tribal Structures and Pakhtunwali in Afghanistan: Their Role in Security and Governance," 2008, http://www.nzdl.org/ (accessed 12 April 2012), 2.

tribal society.[19] Dishonor carries severe consequences and a Pashtun would rather die than bring shame upon his family. Dishonor not only affects the current generation, but also subsequent generations. In some cases, a dishonored Pashtun must leave his village and live as an outsider in another location, relying on his host for protection and survival.[20]

Honor also underpins a "warrior code" which requires an Afghan man to show physical courage in the face of danger.[21] This is critical in a world where military strength can mean the difference between victory and defeat at the hands of other tribes, the Taliban, or other occupying forces. Any outside force that seeks the cooperation of Afghan tribesmen can expect to undergo the same test requiring the demonstration of courage under fire. Until this happens, Pashtuns may remain distant and distrustful.

Revenge

Any challenge to honor can be met with revenge or *badal*. Pashtuns tend to take slights or insults, more seriously than most Westerners. An insult may be against an individual, a family, or an entire tribe. It is common for a personal insult to tarnish the honor of an entire tribe, driving a communal desire for revenge and retribution. The desire for revenge endures over time and will transcend generations. "If a Pashtun took his revenge after 100 years, it means that he is still in a hurry"[22] Failure to seek or achieve revenge is a matter of honor and can bring great shame upon a Pashtun and his family. In dealing with Pashtuns, Westerners may find it difficult to understand the inner workings of honor because disputes that necessitate revenge can transcend generations.

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[19]Ibid., 3.

[20]Fredrik Barth, *Political Leadership among Swat Pathans* (London: University of London Humanities Press, 1965), 82.

[21]Jim Gant, *A Strategy for Success in Afghanistan: One Tribe at a Time*, 2009, http://blog.stevenpressfield.com (accessed 30 August 2011), 23.

[22]Miakhel, 5.

Hospitality

While Pashtuns can be vengeful, they can also display great hospitality or *melmastia.* All guests, known or unknown, are extended hospitality. Guests receive the best food, the best accommodations, and most importantly protection. This protection extends until the guest reaches the next village or destination. If a guest is dishonored or killed, the host is required to seek revenge on behalf of the guest. Pashtuns seek to protect guests as they would protect women and family. Mistreatment of guests spawns many of the disputes between families and villages.[23] This tradition of hospitality is in stark contrast with a history of "fighting off invaders for thousands of years, from Genghis Khan and Alexander the Great to the colonial British, the Soviets and, now, NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization)."[24] In *Pashtunwali,* there is a fine line between a guest and an outsider. The process of determining who is a guest is subjective with no fixed standard.

Politics

Although Pashtun tribes in Afghanistan are social organizations, they play an important role in politics. "Most of the tribes [Pashtun] in Afghanistan are neither corporate nor political entities, yet the tribal system has more often than not served as the blue print for political alliances."[25] Understanding how Afghan tribesmen organize and engage in political activity provides further understanding of their way of life.

Political power at the tribal level often lies with the most powerful tribal figure in a given area. Identifying and engaging that person may serve as the gateway to the tribe. However,

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[23]Ibid., 7.

[24]James Fergusson, "Pashtunforums," http://www.pashtunforums.com/literature-32/james-fergusson-taliban-20142/ (accessed 2 December 2011).

[25]Glatzer, 270.

political power is balanced by the Pashtun tradition of equality amongst all men or *seyal*. While one man may speak for all others in the tribe, the position is contingent upon his ability to provide security and resolve conflicts. Pashtuns value local informal solutions because these methods better satisfy notions of *seyal*, are less corrupt, and achieve quicker, more consistent results.[26] All politics is local and any political figure serves at the pleasure of the other tribe members. Failure to provide protection or make equitable decisions can result in an immediate loss of status.

A tribal leader can maintain his power through controlling tenants, attracting many regular guests through lavish hospitality, channeling resources from the outside world to one's followers, superior rhetoric, and sound judgment demonstrated in the *shuras* and *jirgas*, in addition to gallantry in the face of danger.[27] The effects of the actions are temporary, and require continuance over time to reinforce the positional power of the tribal leader.

Because there is no associated office or underlying political structure within a tribe, power lies solely with an individual. If a person loses his political position or dies, the power and alliances formed by that individual disappear. This makes the system inherently unstable, and can cause conflict within a tribe and amongst other villages or tribes. This is in contrast to a western system where continuity is inherent in the political system, and not solely provided by the individual.

Although Afghanistan currently has a centralized government, the only consistent means of political power is found within tribes. Regardless of the existence of a central government, the Pashtuns usually resist its influence because they view the world as *acephalous*, or without a paramount chief.[28] This resistance is a hallmark of the Pashtun tribes. In 1908, a British official

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[26]Ali Wardak, "Building a Post-War Justice System in Afghanistan," Institute for Afghan Studies, http://www.institutefor-afghan-studies.org/Contributions/Projects/Ali-Wardak/ Law%20and%20Social (accessed 11 April 2012).

[27]Glatzer, 272.

[28]Blood, 7.

debated a Pashtun tribesman on the benefits of a central government. The tribesman replied, "We are content with discord, we are content with alarms, we are content with blood . . . we will never be content with a master."[29] Tribes rely on *jirgas* or *marakas* in lieu of a central government.

Jirga

The *jirga* or *maraka*, which is a meeting or council of elders, is the embodiment of tribal governance at the local level.[30] It serves as the main forum for decision-making and dispute resolution. Membership in a *jirga* is not fixed and can change within a tribe each time one convenes. Members are selected based on their standing in the community and have "proven to be honest, impartial and understand the role of the Jirga."[31] The process of selection is pure democracy, with members elected or appointed by all that have a stake in the decision. Key to the success of the *jirga* is its ability to enforce and implement a decision. "All Pashtuns embrace it, and all accept the finality of the *jirga* process as the impartial arbiter of tribal law."[32]

There is a second form of *jirga*, the *loya jirga* or Grand Council.[33] To address an issue of national concern, tribes or the government of Afghanistan may convene a *loya jirga*. In the past three hundred years, there have been less than twenty *loya jirgas* convened.[34] Some of the most critical *loya jirgas* have taken place in the last ten years. For example, in 2004 during a *loya jirga*

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[29]Tanner, 134.

[30]Miakhel, 7.

[31]Ibid.

[32]Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason, "No Sign until the Burst of Fire: Understanding the Pakistan-Afghanistan Frontier," *International Security* 32, no. 4 (Spring 2008): 60.

[33]Ibid., 68.

[34]Tom A. Peter, "What Is a Loya Jirga? Afghanistan's Most Pivotal Jirgas since 2002," *The Christian Science Monitor*, 20 November 2011, http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-South-Central/2011/1120/Afghanistan-loya-jirga-endorses-lingering-US-presence-but-in-what-form (accessed 29 January 2012).

a new constitution was ratified and in 2011 discussions where held about U.S. troop withdrawal in 2014.[35]

In comparison to a *jirga,* they are rare and do not play a role in the day-to-day lives of Pashtuns. In the rural areas, more than 90 percent of all issues are decided through *jirgas*.[36]

> People accept Jirgas as a means of Informal Justice System because it is cheaper, accessible, and shorter way of solving dispute and prevent future enmity. But the formal justice system in Afghanistan is expensive, takes longer time and cannot stop future enmity. Also due to lack of capacity and corruption, people have less confidence on the formal justice system. In many instances, the final decision of the Formal Justice System cannot be implemented by executive branch.[37]

The current Afghan government structure runs counter to traditional Pashtun ideals about the relationship between tribes and the central government because it prevents the tribes from having a meaningful voice in national decision making. The system as it currently stands places disproportionate power in the hands of a small group of individuals. This imbalance of powers generates a feeling of disenfranchisement among many Afghans, particularly Pashtuns. It has also perpetuated the belief that the government is discriminatory towards Pashtuns and this reinforces resistance to any central government.

Counterinsurgency Operations in the Pashtun Tribal Regions

Doctrine

The United States Army defines counterinsurgency as "military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions taken by a government to defeat insurgency."[38] In the

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[35]Ibid.

[36]Miakhel, 8.

[37]Ibid.

[38]Department of the Army, Field Manual 1-02, Ch.1, *Operational Terms and Graphics* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, February 2010), 1-47.

latest Joint Publication, JP 1-20, *Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* dated 2010; COIN is defined as, "comprehensive civilian and military efforts taken to defeat an insurgency and to address any core grievances."[39] Regardless of the variations in the definitions, the approach for counterinsurgency in Afghanistan has focused on "clear-hold-build."[40] Clear-hold-build aims to achieve the following stated objectives:

1. Create a secure physical and psychological environment

2. Establish firm government control of the populace and area

3. Gain the populace's support[41]

The primary tasks to accomplish in order to achieve these goals are:

1. Provide continuous security for the local populace

2. Eliminate insurgent presence

3. Reinforce political primacy

4. Enforce the rule of law

5. Rebuild host nation institutions[42]

Application

The following is an examination of the application of the clear-hold-build approach when engaging the Pashtun tribes in Afghanistan. Specifically, the focus was on portions of the provinces of Kunar and Nuristan.

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[39]U.S. Department of Defense, Joint Publication 1-02, *Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washinton, DC: Government Printing Office, November 2010), 79.

[40]U.S. Department of the Army, Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, 5-18.

[41]Ibid.

[42]Ibid.

History of Kunar and Nuristan

The provinces of Kunar and Nuristan (figure 1) are especially difficult places to conduct counterinsurgency operations. Kunar Province's central feature is a forested valley home to the Kunar River that flows some 300 miles southward along the Afghan-Pakistan border.[43]

The province has a population of 413,008.[44] The valley has long been a route used to pass between, now modern Pakistan and Afghanistan. Alexander the Great invaded the valley in the fourth century B.C. and the local inhabitants burned their homes and took up arms against his troops.[45] The British fared no better when they occupied the region in the late 19th century. They artificially divided the Pashtun tribes between British India (modern Pakistan) and Kunar, Afghanistan, in the hopes of quelling the Pashtun's warring ways.[46] The Pashtun tribes did not recognize the artificial division and they continued their armed resistance into the 1930s.

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[43]Brian Glyn Williams, "Afghanistan's Heart of Darkness: Fighting the Taliban in Kunar Province," *CTC Sentinel* 1, no. 12 (November 2008).

[44]World Food Programme, "Kunar," http://www.foodsecurityatlas.org/afg/country/provincial-Profile/Kunar (accessed 1 January 2012).

[45]A. B. Bosworth, *Conquest and Empire: The Reign of Alexander the Great* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Williams, 121.
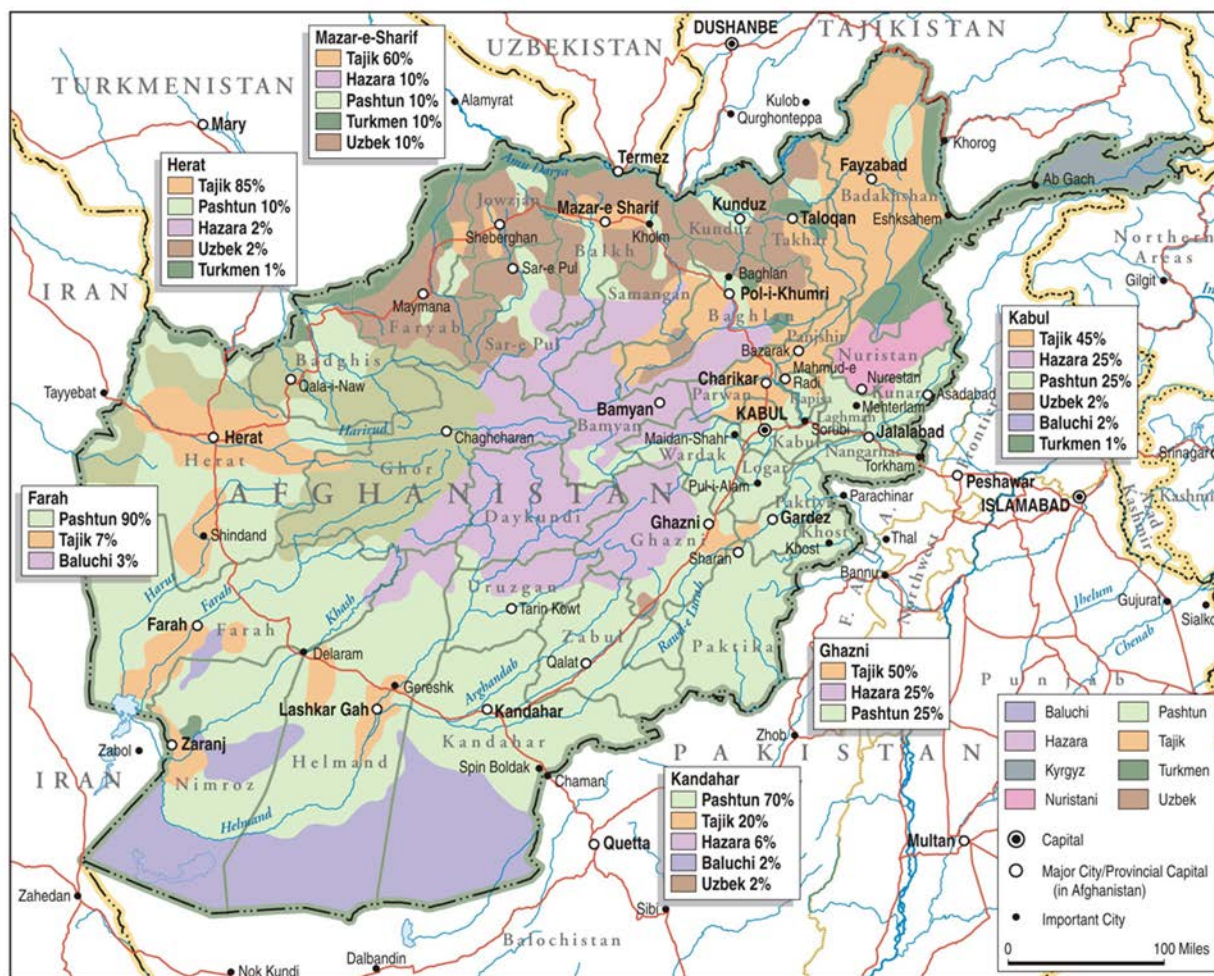
[46]Williams, 1.

Figure 1.   Ethno-linguistic Divisions in Afghanistan
Source: Frederick W. Kagan et al., *Defining Success in Afghanistan* (Washington, DC: The American Enterprise Institute and The Institute for the Study of War, 2011), 4.

In 1978, the Pashtun tribes of Kunar united with their Northern neighbors, the Nuristanis, to attack the Communist government that tried to undermine their traditional way of life by imposing Communist reforms on the tribes themselves. One Afghan expert, Larry P. Goodson, commented on the impact of the Communist efforts, "These reforms struck at the very heart of the socioeconomic structure of Afghanistan's rural society."[47] The Pashtuns and Nuristanis were

[47]Tanner, 231.

so incensed they formed *lashkars* or local fighting units to attack regional Communist outposts.[48]
These *lashkars* evolved into the *mujahideen* who continued to battle Soviet Forces throughout the
1980s.

Much of the modern resistance to outside forces stems from the initiation of military
operations in the Kunar Province in April of 1979. This operation was part of a larger campaign
in the Kunar Valley, executed in retaliation for attacks against Communist outposts. The Soviets
committed 10,000 troops to the area, along with 7,500 Afghan troops. Afghan Army troops and
their Soviet advisors executed 1,100 Kunari Pashtuns in the village of Kerala.[49] For the next
decade, the Soviets and Afghan troops battled the *mujahideen* for control of the province.

Nuristan, the province just north of Kunar has an equally violent past that shapes the
collective memory of the people who live there. Nuristan is one of the most remote and primitive
provinces in Afghanistan. Small rivers bisect the region, creating numerous valleys separated by
mountain ridges. Until 1896, Nuristan was Kafiristan because *kafirs* or non-believers of Islam
inhabited it. Islam was imposed on the inhabitants and the area was renamed Nuristan, or the
"Land of Light."[50] Even though Nuristanis are ethnically different from Kunari Pashtuns, they
share a common reputation as warriors. "Feuds are an important part of the culture and many
cultural values are reflected in the feud. For example, courage and honor are strong values and
provide themes for many stories and songs. Men strive to be fierce warriors who are loyal to their
kin, dangerous to their enemies, and ready to fight whenever necessary."[51]

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[48]Williams, 1.

[49]Tanner, 232.

[50]Ibid., 64.

[51]Staff of the Combat Studies Institute, *Wanat: Combat Action in Afghanistan, 2008* (Fort
Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2010), 7.

The population of Nuristan has traditionally relied on its geographic isolation and small compact settlements for defense from outsiders.[52] They maintain the same distrust of outsiders as their Pashtun neighbors to the south. The isolated settlements are largely autonomous and independent, and most households have access to weapons for self-defense.[53] They follow a code similar to *Pashtunwali* called *Kalasha char*.[54] This code establishes behavioral norms that stress, "honor, self-respect, independence, justice, hospitality, conflict resolution, personal improvement, personal responsibility, charity, forgiveness, worship, and revenge."[55] Given the similarities to the Pashtuns culturally, it was not hard for the Nuristanis to ally themselves with the Pashtuns in Kunar. In the 1950s, both the Pashtuns and the Nuristanis adopted a more fundamentalist form of Islam.[56] The relationship between them grew stronger during the 1978 uprising against the Communist Afghan government. It is against this backdrop of mistrust and isolationism that U.S. forces entered the provinces of Kunar and Nuristan.

Clear

The provinces fall under Regional Command-East (RC-East) (figure 2), headquartered at Bagram Airfield in the east central region of Afghanistan. "The 'clear' and 'hold' phases of the new population-centric COIN strategy required U.S. and Afghan forces to expand their operations in Kunar and Nuristan and establish a permanent presence among the population."[57] The

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[52]Ibid., 4.

[53]Ibid., 7.

[54]David Tate, "Battle of Wanat Historical Analysis: Rough Draft Release," http://www.battlefieldtourist.com/content/battle-of-wanat-historical-analysis-rough-draft-release/ (accessed 10 March 2012).

[55]The Staff of the Combat Studies Institute, 8.

[56]Williams, 1.

[57]Michael Moore and James Fussell, *Kunar and Nuristan: Rethinking U.S. Counterinsurgency Operations* (Washington, DC: Institute for the Study of War, 2009), 10.

compliment of U.S. forces within RC-East was never more than two maneuver brigades, but was generally assigned a single brigade combat team (BCT) with 5,000 to 6,000 soldiers. One BCT was given the mission to secure an area of 58,000 square miles, which is roughly the size of Florida.[58] In addition to wide expanses of mountainous terrain, the area has an estimated population of 525,000 Afghans.[59] Achieving the ideal force ratio of 20 soldiers for every 1,000 civilians for effective counterinsurgency operations was not feasible given the troops allocated to the area of operations.[60] Commenting on the forces available, Thomas H. Johnson, a Professor at the Naval Postgraduate School commented, "The absence of an adequate number of troops and sufficient resources, they [U.S] have not been able to secure the countryside to an extent that has allowed for reconstruction strategies to be pursued in an integrated and safe fashion."[61]

The forces were too few in number and they were employed in such remote areas away from the population they were supposed to secure. In spite of this limitation, by 2008 RC-East was dotted with combat outposts, manned by platoon-sized elements, which numbered between thirty to forty Soldiers each.[62] The majority of Afghans in Kunar and Nuristan do not live in the remote valleys. They live south of Asadabad in the lower Kunar River Valley. "U.S. forces actually pushed north into remote valleys in the interior of Kunar and eastern Nuristan where fewer and fewer people lived. In these sparsely-populated areas, the people were even more

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[58]StateofFlorida.com., "Florida Quick Facts," http://www.stateofflorida.com/Portal/DesktopDefault.aspx?tabid=95 (accessed 2 January 2012).

[59]The Staff of the Combat Studies Institute, 34.

[60]Department of the Army, Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, 1-13.

[61]Thomas H. Johnson, "On the Edge of the Big Muddy: The Taliban Resurgence in Afghanistan," *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 5, no. 2 (2008): 106.

[62]The Staff of the Combat Studies Institute, 15.

spread out and more difficult to reach, and thus extremely hard to defend, especially given the

limited number of forces available in eastern Afghanistan."[63]

As U.S. forces expanded their presence into remote valleys, like the Pech and Korengal,

they encountered the Taliban and wary villagers. Given the small size of the U.S. forces, air and

artillery strikes were critical force multipliers in firefights with the Taliban. The firepower

brought to bear had a devastating effect on insurgents in the two provinces, but it also took a

heavy toll on relations with the local people.

Figure 2.   ISAF regional commands in Afghanistan
Source: Ahmad Shuja, "How the American Military Sees Its Campaign in Afghanistan
Progressing," http://www.undispatch.com/how-the-american-military-sees-its-campaign-in-
afghanistan-progressing (accessed 2 January 2012).

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[63]Moore and Fussell, 10.

In 2008 alone, over five hundred and fifty-two Afghans died due to Coalition air strikes, incidents in Kunar and Nuristan provinces accounted for roughly 10 percent of that total.[64] The Taliban turned the most effective weapons in the U.S. arsenal against them by fighting around the remote villages.

> The Taliban purposely retreat to village areas after an operation hoping that the coalition will attack. At the strategic level, the Taliban is fighting a classic 'war of the flea,' largely along the same lines used by the mujahideen twenty years ago against the Soviets, including fighting in villages to deliberately provoke air strikes and collateral damage. They gladly trade the lives of a few dozen guerilla fighters in order to cost the American forces the permanent loyalty of that village.[65]

The Taliban seized upon the loss of civilian lives "to seemingly validate their narratives that the conflict in Afghanistan is a 'cosmic conflict between the righteous' and the infidel who want to kill innocent Muslims."[66] In a culture that has revenge as one of its core values, the death of innocents makes establishing the trust necessary to build a relationship difficult. It cedes momentum and influence to the Taliban.

It is undisputed that U.S. operations resulted in civilian and Taliban deaths. The killing of civilians by U.S. forces was an affront to the honor of Pashtuns who are duty bound to protect their families from harm. The killing of civilians caused dishonor, which to a Pashtun is often viewed as worse than death. Dishonor may follow that family unless the death is avenged and may persist long after the actual event that caused the death, potentially even transcending generations. To redress a slight to honor, a Pashtun is likely to seek revenge against the agent that caused the death, in this case U.S. forces. There is no timeframe in the western sense for exacting revenge against the perpetrator. Pashtuns will not forget, and honor cannot be restored until

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[64]United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan, Human Rights Unit, *Afghanistan: Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, 2008* (New York: United Nations, 2009), 15.

[65]Johnson, "On the Edge of the Big Muddy: The Taliban Resurgence in Afghanistan," 125. Quoted in Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason, "Understanding the Taliban and Insurgency in Afghanistan," *Orbis* (Winter 2007): 87.

[66]Johnson, "On the Edge of the Big Muddy: The Taliban Resurgence in Afghanistan."

revenge is taken. When viewed in this context, civilian casualties were very damaging to U.S. efforts to gain the support of the Pashtuns, which was one of the objectives during the clear phase of COIN operations.

Although U.S. forces had success in killing Taliban in their operations, these deaths caused an unintended consequence. Many of the Taliban fighters who were killed were also Pashtuns, and had sought protection from U.S. forces under *melmastia* or hospitality.[67] As already discussed, under *Pashtunwali*, guests seeking protection receive the same status as family members. The killing of a guest is an affront to honor with revenge is the likely remedy. This, in combination with civilian casualties made U.S. efforts to combat the Taliban counterproductive in the eyes of the Pashtuns. The limited amount of U.S. forces, combined with a lack of understanding of *Pashtunwali* hampered U.S. efforts to create a secure environment and gain the trust of Pashtuns.

While U.S. forces battled insurgents, they could not effectively clear them from all areas within the remote portions of the two provinces. In fact, in some cases their presence actually attracted insurgents into areas that had previously only seen transient insurgents on their way from Pakistan into the area surrounding Kandahar. One U.S. Commander described the remote areas of Kunar Province as "a Taliban magnet, drawing insurgents from more populated areas, and enhancing security elsewhere"[68] The perspective from the Soldiers in the combat outpost was more succinct, describing their role as "the bullet sponge."[69] The manner in which U.S. forces

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[67]Outreach Strategists LLC, *Going Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan: Towards a Better Understanding of the Pashtun* (Houston, TX: Outreach Strategists LLC, 2009), 7.

[68]C. J. Chivers, "G.I.'S in Remote Afghan Post Have Weary Job, Drawing Fire," *The New York Times*, 9 November 2008, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/10/world/asia/10outpost.html?page wanted=all (accessed 11 April 2012), A1.

[69]Ibid.

conducted clearing operations in fighting the Taliban directly hampered their ability to achieve their objectives.

Hold

Operations during the hold stage, by doctrine are designed to:

1. Continuously secure the people and separate then from the insurgents.

2. Establish a firm government presence and control over the area and populace.

3. Recruit, organize, equip, and train local security forces.

4. Establish a government political apparatus to replace the insurgent apparatus.

5. Develop a dependable network of sources by authorized intelligence assets.[70]

Given the fact that almost all combat outposts within the two provinces were separated by a helicopter flight or a daylong drive, there was no way for the U.S. and Afghan forces to effectively secure the people. Insurgents easily flowed around the combat outposts and attacked at the time and place of their choosing. One U.S. commander assessed the situation and "concluded that in view of the terrain in his area of operations (AO) and his limited number of troops, he would never be able to clear enemy forces from the AO, hold or secure those areas that were cleared, and build infrastructure, governance, and gradually improve the capacity of the Afghan Security Forces (ASF)."[71]

Instead of reducing the violence and increasing security, the insurgency increased in ferocity. Over the course of a fourteen-month deployment, spanning the spring of 2007 to the summer of 2008, one U.S. task force operating in Kunar province experienced 1,100 troops in contact (TIC), called in 5,400 fire missions, and 3,800 bombing or close combat attacks (CCAs)

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[70]Department of the Army, Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, 5-20.

[71]The Staff of the Combat Studies Institute, 35.

from fixed and rotary wing attack aviation.[72] Essentially, they were never able to leave the "clear"

phase of counterinsurgency operations because they could not cover the assigned area of

operations. This inability to remove the Taliban affected the credibility of the U.S. approach and

hampered their efforts to influence the Pashtuns and their tribal institutions.

As previously stated, the Afghans in this area had no interest in seeing the Afghan

government exercise control over their lives. The idea of democratic elections is a recent concept

in the context of Afghan politics. Traditionally, rulers of Afghanistan were dynastic or religious,

not elected.[73] In the first elections held in 1964 "the bulk of the ninety-five percent of the non-

literate Afghans living villages and nomadic camps, knew little and cared less about the 'New

Democracy'."[74] In general, Pashtuns maintain a distrust of national elections and those that

ascend to power as a result. Because of this Pashtuns view, President Karzai's election was

illegitimate because he did not achieve his position through traditional means. Consequently, the

Pashtun's resisted his rule because in their tribal society, dynastic and religious authority had

been the only legitimate sources of power for over a thousand years.[75]

The impetus to bring governance to these areas is mistakenly informed by the belief that

these areas are ungoverned. Ungoverned spaces are the breeding ground for terrorist

organizations like al-Qaeda. From a western perspective, there is no functioning government, but

that ignores or discounts governance on the tribal level. "The tribal areas of Afghanistan are

alternatively governed spaces: they are governed, as they have been for a millennium by tribal

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[72]Ibid., 36.

[73]Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason, "Refighting the Last War: Afghanistan and the Vietnam Template," *Military Review* (November-December, 2009): 4.

[74]Dupree, 587.

[75]Ibid., 589.

law."[76] Attempting to inject the authority of the Afghan government is an attack on the *jirga*, or council of elders, which serves as the primary governing body at the tribal level. U.S. efforts to bring the rule of the Afghan government to Pashtun tribal areas were counterproductive because in the eyes of Pashtuns it sought to undermine or replace the *jirga*. An understanding of how governance functions at the tribal level would have made it clear that attempting to inject the rule of the Afghan government was an uninformed idea.

Johnson again commented on U.S. efforts to expand the Afghan government. "This is a dangerous and fundamentally bankrupt approach, arrived at by misguided bureaucrats, policy analysts, and Westernized Afghan elites, who are first to downplay the importance of tribalism and the Pashtun tribal code known as *Pashtunwali*."[77] He further argued that the reason that these provinces have been so dangerous is that as U.S. forces push into these areas, the people resist their presence because they do not offer any solutions. "The perspective of extending the reach of central government is, in fact, precisely the wrong answer to apply to a highly developed culture in which 'central government' is anathema and reaction to it is insurgency: the fact that the insurgency in Afghanistan has grown steadily in intensity, lethality, and amount of territory under Taliban control every year since this policy was enshrined is not a coincidence."[78] Even if Pashtuns acknowledged the mechanism of a national election, they view the government as corrupt, ineffective, and detrimental to the tribal way of life.[79]

Rejection of U.S. efforts to bring the Afghan central government's influence into Pashtun tribal areas was also predicated on the idea of *seyal* or equality amongst men. Pashtuns view their

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[76]Johnson and Mason, "Refighting the Last War," 10.

[77]Johnson and Mason, "No Sign until the Burst of Fire," 54.

[78]Ibid., 55.

[79]Larry Goodson and Thomas H. Johnson, "How the Soviets Lost in Afghanistan, How the Americans are Losing," http://www.fpri.org/enotes/201104.goodson_johnson.afghanistan.html (accessed 8 March 2012).

tribal governance as more democratic because representatives at the tribal level rely on the support of the locally governed for their position. A failure to provide security or act in the best interests of the people results in dismissal. Representatives at the highest levels of Afghan government are not elected at the tribal level, cannot be removed by a tribal vote, and are therefore viewed as illegitimate.

Build

The "build" phase of the approach focuses on increasing support for the Host Nation government by "protecting the local population."[80] Improvement in Host Nation legitimacy happens by efforts that provide "an overt and direct benefit for the community."[81] In Kunar and Nuristan, the focus was on improving the infrastructure as a way of showing what the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIRoA) could provide in the tribal areas.

"Although development is critical in this impoverished country, roads are the single most important path to success in Afghanistan."[82] Road building was the focus for U.S. efforts to not only show competency on the part of the GIRoA but also as a means of fighting the Taliban. The roads allowed access to more remote areas. A statement by General Karl Eikenberry left no doubt about the idea of roads being critical "Where the road ends, the Taliban begins."[83] Vice President Biden affirmed this approach when he said, "How do you spell hope in Pashto and Dari? A-S-P-H-A-L-T."[84] Road building was the mechanism used to engage tribal leaders and seek their

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[80]Department of the Army, Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, 5-20.

[81]Ibid., 5-21.

[82]Nathaniel C. Fick and John A. Nagl, "Counterinsurgency Field Manual: Afghanistan Edition," *Foreign Policy* (January 2009), http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2009/01/05/ counterinsurgency_field_manual_afghanistan_edition?page=0,1 (accessed 13 March 2012).

[83]Andrew Wilder, "Winning Hearts and Minds?" http://afghanistanforum.wordpress.com/tag/ karl-eikenberry/ (accessed 13 March 2012).

[84]Ibid.

support for the projects. The enticement was twofold, there were jobs constructing the roads as well as securing the workers from Taliban attack.

The Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) became the mechanism of choice to implement this approach. "The logic for these developments is that poverty causes conflict, therefore reconstruction assistance will lead to economic development, and then stability. Also assumed was 'aid winds hearts and minds' and that more government presence means more stability."[85] In 2008, the PRT operating in Kunar province, spent $43 million on infrastructure projects.[86] These projects focused on road construction, bridge building, and erecting local government buildings. From a U.S. perspective, this improved the economic opportunity for Afghans living in the provinces. From a tribal perspective, it gave the outside world better access to them. In total, the U.S. spent $70 million and built roads that connected all fourteen districts in Kunar Province to the provincial capital of Asadabad.[87] The lasting benefit of these efforts is disputable. There was no overwhelming desire for many of the inhabitants of rural valleys to travel. The roads gave U.S. and Afghan forces the ability to better maneuver in a landscape devoid of roads and bridges. It extended the operational reach of the forces into even more remote areas with the negative consequences of increased fighting which led to civilian casualties.

In Nuristan, the U.S. planned a similar approach to extend the reach of its forces. In 2006, Dr. David Katz who worked for the U.S. State Department in Nuristan observed that there was $50 million in road projects planned for the province.[88] He assessed the plans for most of the

[85]Ibid.

[86]The Staff of the Combat Studies Institute, 39.

[87]The Institute for the Study of War, "Regional Command East," http://www.understanding war.org/region/regional-command-east (accessed 14 March 2012).

[88]David J. Katz and Richard Strand, "Afghanistan's Nuristan Region in Strategic and Ethnographic Context" (Lecture, 2007), http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=150552832 5221759820# (accessed 14 March 2012).

roads as "crazy," with routes that did not run along natural routes of travel in river valleys and there was no provision for snow removal or road maintenance.[89] He also observed that the Nuristanis did not want to work in these areas because of poor pay, harsh and dangerous living conditions, and a general distrust of people from other tribes.[90] His assessment was that Nuristan "was not a viable province."[91]

In spite of this assessment, efforts to build roads in the hopes of winning the cooperation of the Nuristanis did happen, the number was small, and research did not reveal a reliable documented figure for roads built.[92] Ultimately, the efforts had little to no effect within the province. Major James Fussell, who spent several years in Nuristan, observed in 2009 "there are no paved roads in many parts of Nuristan. The U.S. military has built roads in some of the neighboring provinces, but faced resistance in Nuristan, where many communities want to remain isolated as part of a defense strategy. They don't want strangers coming into their area."[93] The evidence shows that the people of Kunar and Nuristan were not receptive to the U.S. building efforts as a means to bolster the influence of the Afghan Government. This inability to influence the people with projects is indicative of one more failure to understand the dynamics of tribal society. People that value isolation as a means to protect themselves from intruders do not view increased access to their territory as beneficial. Protection of family is one of the key factors in

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[89]Ibid.

[90]Ibid.

[91]Ibid.

[92]Civil-Military Fusion Centre, "Afghanistan Review," 18 January 2012, https://www.cimic web.org/Documents/CFC%20AFG%20Newsletters%20Archive/CFC_Afghanistan-Review-18Jan12.pdf (accessed 14 March 2012). This report shows that no roads were built by the U.S. or NATO partners in the province of Nuristan. Other sources have provided conflicting data ranging from 12 kilometers up to 70 kilometers. There is not a reliable way to determine an accurate figure given the conflicting data found during research on this specific issue.

[93]Jackie Northam, "U.S. Troops Withdraw from Isolated Afghan Areas," 25 September 2009, http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=113182575 (accessed 14 March 2012).

preserving honor from a Pashtun perspective. If U.S. forces better understood how Pashtuns viewed their activities, a different approach may have proved more successful. Assessing the successes or failures of the efforts in Kunar and Nuristan became a moot point when in late 2009 U.S. forces began to withdraw forces from rural areas and concentrate more on populated urban areas.[94]

This shift in policy placed a "premium on protecting the population, especially in towns and cities where the Taliban has made inroads."[95] It may have achieved that aim, but it ceded control of the two provinces to the Taliban, who immediately filled the vacuum left by withdrawing U.S. forces. Haji Sakhi Mashnai, a member of parliament from Kunar, referring to the U.S. withdrawal, "It made it easy for the Taliban to take over any district."[96] Local Pashtuns and Nuristanis observed, "they [the Taliban] can easily move throughout the districts or into parts of Kunar without an established military presence."[97] The message this sends to the people in Kunar and Nuristan is that these areas do not matter. Noor-ul-haq-Ulumi, a former Afghan Army general said, "If the government ignores these sorts of provinces, then the government may as well just secure Kabul and forget about the rest of the country."[98] This shift in approach to the population centers may have better supported the goals of clear-hold-build, but for those Pashtuns that did cooperate with U.S. efforts found themselves unprotected and in the midst of the Taliban. This further damaged the credibility of U.S. forces in a culture that relies on personal relationships to build trust.

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[94]Tom A. Peter, "As NATO Pulls Back, Afghans Worry About Taliban's Return," *The Christian Science Monitor*, 21 July 2011, http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-South-Central/2011/0721/As-NATO-pulls-back-Afghans-worry-about-Taliban-s-return (accessed 14 March 2012).

[95]Northam.

[96]Peter, "As NATO Pulls Back, Afghans Worry About Taliban's Return."

[97]Ibid.

[98]Ibid.

Alternative Approaches

This chapter examined alternative approaches to engaging Pashtun tribes in Afghanistan. Major Jim Gant, a U.S. Army Special Forces Officer, has authored an alternative to the current U.S. approach to COIN operations in Afghanistan. His approach focuses on working with the tribes and embracing their way of life, and not imposing western constructs like a strong central government on them. He identifies four truisms about the tribal culture in Afghanistan that set the backdrop for his approach. They are that tribes understand people, protection, power, and projection. "Tribes offer their members security, safety, structure, and significance. What other institutions do that right now in Afghanistan?"[99] His point is that instead of trying to disrupt something that has worked for hundreds of years and replace it with a western democratic government, using the methods of tribal democracy are the key to success for U.S. forces. "We must support the tribal system because it is the single, unchanging political, social, and cultural reality in Afghan society and the one system that all Afghans understand, even if we don't."[100]

Gant acknowledges that the goal of U.S. strategy is correct, but implemented in an incorrect fashion. "Counterinsurgency strategy is rightly predicated on this primary objective: to "secure the population where they sleep. But how? Right now, this effort has come entirely from the Kabul government, either through US forces or through the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP)."[101] Without direct involvement of the Pashtuns at the tribal level, resistance to any efforts will continue.

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[99]Gant, 14.

[100]Ibid.

[101]Ibid., 25.

Tribal Engagement Strategy

His proposed alternative is the Tribal Engagement Strategy (TES), which relies upon

Tribal Engagement Teams (TET)[102] comprised of U.S. forces, which are responsible for

implementation. This strategy follows the clear-hold-build approach, but with alternative goals:

1. Securing Pashtuns with Tribal Security Forces (TSF)

2. Promoting good governance at the tribal level

3. Interdicting external support for insurgents

4. Integrating Pashtun TSFs with national security forces[103]

The TET trains, equips, and supports the TSF with indirect fires and close air support. The goal is

to create tribal areas that are secured by TSFs and have the ability to "retaliate in strength against

the Taliban."[104] As Gant sees it, "Security at the local (tribal) level is the key to security and

support at the national level. No political change will ever take place without true security at the

tribal level. A Tribal Engagement Strategy can help do that."[105] Properly implemented, this local

security approach will also produce a trusting relationship with local tribal leaders. This trust will

assist in the development of good governance.

The *jirga*, a meeting or council of elders, represents governance at the tribal level. Gant

observed while in Afghanistan that "traditional tribal mechanisms have been weakened by brutal

and deliberate campaigns of assassination, intimidation, and co-optation-first by the Soviets, then

the warlords, and now by the Taliban."[106] The TSF is the key to reestablishing the authority and

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[102]Ibid., 32. A TET is a small team of U.S. Soldiers organized like a Special Forces A-Team. They are highly trained, capable of operating independently in austere locations, with the primary mission of advising, assisting, training, and leading at the tribal level.

[103]Ibid., 26.

[104]Ibid.

[105]Ibid.

[106]Ibid.

power of the *jirga* at the tribal level. The security fostered by the TSF protects the decision makers and the process from Taliban influence. In many rural tribal areas, the Taliban and its "shadow governments of Sharia law courts" has been the only source of justice.[107] This reestablishment of security and governance will aid in efforts to separate the Taliban from the tribes. Gant's logic is that with a TSF supported by a TET, and with a functioning security apparatus underpinning local governance, the Taliban will have no choice but to assimilate or leave. If this approach succeeds, Gant asserts it will have a positive impact on the Pashtun tribal areas along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.[108]

Gant's theory is that, if enough of the tribal areas are controlled, Pashtun tribesmen can police "the infiltration routes from Pakistan (which the tribesmen know as intimately as we [Americans] know the streets of our own hometown), but also provide actionable intelligence about who has crossed over, where they are, and what potential danger they represent."[109] Certainly, tribes have the ability to monitor these areas and report actionable intelligence, their willingness to do so will be predicated on the success of providing security from the Taliban. If successful, the TSFs could secure the Pashtun tribal areas and the border, where the GIRoA has had great difficulty exerting any influence. The key is to link this localized security with national security efforts by the GIRoA.

Gant cautions that the TSFs should be "used to assist-not replace-the national and local police."[110] His argument is that if the approach is successful, the TSFs, the tribal leaders, and the TETs will have formed such a cohesive bond that the introduction of Afghan National Police (ANP) would no longer be required. However, TSFs must interact with the ANP, but the

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[107]Ibid.

[108]Ibid., 27.

[109]Ibid.

[110]Ibid., 28.

mechanism for this is unclear. This is a concern because the presence of the ANP amongst the

Pashtuns has caused conflict, especially when the ANP are not Pashtuns. In a report by the

Foreign Policy Research Institute on the ANP, it found that, "Pashtun regions are likely to see the

police [non-Pashtuns] that are sent by Kabul as illegitimate, irrespective of their effectiveness."[111]

Placing non-Pashtuns in amongst Pashtuns has created "a lot of anger and hostility."[112] Gant's

approach clearly has merit but it is not without risk, and this relationship between the TSFs and

the ANP would need to be refined.

Risk

Gant bases his theory from his experience in Kunar province in 2004. He acknowledges

this approach carries some risk. The most obvious risk is that the TETs would be targets for the

Taliban and a whole host of other actors present on the battlefield. Senior military leaders would

have to underwrite considerable risk to deploy teams into tribal areas. Gant suggests mitigation of

this risk can be achieved through the fighting alliance and trust that will be built between the TET

and Pashtun tribe that will be honor bound to fight with them.[113] Additionally, forces that

comprise these teams would have to be trained, equipped, and deployed.

Gant suggests that instead of fielding several TETs, a pilot program with just a few teams

should be deployed, and once success is achieved, the program could be expanded. This limits the

number of TETs deployed to remote areas, making it easier to provide these teams with

surveillance assets and indirect fire support. Expansion of the effort would require additional

resources to support the TETs, which would come from existing U.S. forces in Afghanistan. If

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[111]Royal United Service Institute and the Foreign Policy Research Institute, "Reforming the Afghan National Police." 2009, www.fpri.org/research/nationalsecurity/afghanpolice/Reforming AfghanNational*Police.pdf* (accessed 11 April 2012), 8.

[112]Ibid.

[113]Gant, 36.

properly resourced, the risk becomes acceptable. However, there are other risks to consider in addition to the Taliban.

Working with individual Pashtun tribes places the TET in a position where they will have to take sides in tribal disputes. "Pashtun tribal society is characterized by a very high degree of distrust, violence, and conflict."[114] A TET embedded with a tribe will have little choice to participate in any tribal conflict or risk losing influence within the tribe and degrading overall mission effectiveness. Gant acknowledges this risk, and suggests that it can be mitigated by "ensuring that we tie what we are doing at the tactical level to regional and national representatives."[115] However, there is no district or provincial government that can effectively project influence into the tribal regions.[116] This issue may be more problematic than Gant acknowledges and may require additional effort at the district or provincial level.

Overall, Gant's approach appears to be viable and is a more focused approach that attempts to meets the needs of Pashtuns by building on their existing tribal ways. Implementation would require adjustments in current U.S. funding, risk tolerance, the rules of engagement, and the TETs would require greater autonomy to act independently and be supported by a streamlined command and control architecture that removes layers of command.[117]

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[114]Leon B. Poullada, The Afghanistan Council of the Asia Society Occasional Papers, No 1, *The Pushtun Role in the Afghan Political System* (New York: Afghanistan Council of the Asia Society, 1970), in Tribal Analysis Center, "Pashtun Tribal Dynamics," 2009, http://www.tribalanalysis center.com/Research-Completed.html (accessed 11 April 2012), 15.

[115]Gant, 36.

[116]Miles Amoore, "Nuristan-Province in Terror as Taliban Return," *The Sunday Times*, 12 June 2011, http://milesamoore.com/2011/06/12/nuristan-province-in-terror-as-taliban-return/ (accessed 20 March 2012).

[117]Gant, 6.

District Approach

Major David Clukey, another U.S. Army Special Forces Officer, with multiple tours in Afghanistan, has offered a second alternative to the current U.S. COIN strategy. His alternative is also guided by the clear-hold-build approach, but focuses on four key areas at the district level:

1. Governance, insulate the district *shura* representatives and district governors from insurgents allowing them to reassert authority.

2. Security, develop the local security apparatus or *arbakai* and place them under the control of local leadership.

3. Support local leaders in addressing the rule of law and human rights (already generally understood through *pashtunwali* and Islamic Law.

4. Focus on economic and social development through the incorporation of a District Development Team (DDT), as an attachment to the military unit assigned to the district.[118]

Clukey advocates for the use of small teams of International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) Soldiers, but instead of working specifically with one individual tribe, they would operate in selected districts. Clukey views the district as the key and he bases this on an idea from Thomas Johnson of the Naval Postgraduate School who wrote,

> Politically and strategically, the most important level of governance in Afghanistan is neither national nor regional nor provincial. Afghan identity is rooted in the *woleswali*: the districts within each province that are typically home to a single clan or tribe. Historically, unrest has always bubbled up from this stratum-whether against Alexander, the Victorian British, or the Soviet Union. Yet the *woleswali* are last, not first, in U.S. military and political strategy.[119]

The key to success for this approach is the deployment of "small, versatile, and independently capable units" into "selected districts to address GIRoA development objectives, U.S. and NATO stabilization goals, and most importantly, to restore authority to local leaders and marginalize

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[118]David S. Clukey, "A District Approach in Afghanistan?," *Small Wars Journal* (2010), http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/journal/docs-temp/415-clukey.pdf (accessed 18 February 2012).

[119]Johnson and Mason, "All Counterinsurgency Is Local."

insurgent influence."[120] Because the teams would be responsible for an entire district, and not one tribe, the team would have to be larger in composition than those used by Gant.

Johnson proposed that to implement the district approach in the Pashtun south and east, it would require 20,000 personnel distributed across two hundred districts in one hundred person teams.[121] This would provide the requisite manpower to engage multiple tribes and villages throughout the district. This in turn would provide security at the local level and foster the development of the *arbakai*, who would protect district *shura* representatives and district governors from the Taliban. Once secured, the local leaders would assume responsibility for the reestablishment of the rule of law. A District Development Team (DDT) working in conjunction with district leaders would accomplish economic and social development. Clukey's approach is tailored to work with Pashtun tribes in rural Afghanistan. However, this approach is not without risks.

Risk

The robust manning of the district teams mitigates the risk of the Taliban overrunning and killing or capturing an entire team. However, operating in remote areas still requires the support of surveillance, logistics and fire support assets, but the inherent firepower of a one hundred-man garrison makes them less vulnerable than the TET under Gant's approach. Clukey's approach also mitigates the risk of involvement in tribal warfare because the district team works throughout an entire district, and does not focus on just one tribe. In fact, the district team is more likely to mediate any such conflict due to its widespread engagement and influence with tribal leaders throughout the district. Even though this approach appears to accomplish a better job mitigating the risk of operating in remote tribal areas, it is not without challenges.

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[120]Clukey.

[121]Johnson and Mason, "All Counterinsurgency Is Local."

Challenges

Clukey identifies five areas of concern for the district approach:

1. Execution cannot begin immediately.

2. A proponent unit and command relationship requires further analysis.

3. Commitment of limited Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and ISAF to selected

districts.

4. The proponency of the *arbakai* (tribal security system).

5. *Arbakai* funding, regulation, and demobilization.[122]

All military operations are subject to the constraints of time. A force of 20,000, even if drawn

from within Afghanistan would require re-organization, months of training, and then re-location

throughout the country. To be successful, this approach would likely have to be the new NATO

strategy going forward with the full support of ISAF and NATO. The final three challenges

would have to be addressed by a combined effort between ISAF and the GIRoA, where they

determine how to best fund, control, and interface with *arbakai* with the existing ANSF and

ISAF.

Conclusion

Summary

The author began with an examination of Pashtuns and their code of *Pashtunwali.* This

was followed by an analysis of the application of U.S. COIN doctrine using the clear-hold-build

approach. This approach was the basis for engaging Pashtun tribes in the provinces of Kunar and

Nuristan. Finally, two alternative approaches, one which was based on engaging the Pashtun

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[122]Clukey.

tribes individually using small TETs, and the other focused on using the district level of government as the mechanism to engage the Pashtun tribes.

Findings

There are key tenets of *Pashtunwali* that must be understood to effectively engage Pashtuns in a meaningful way. These include honor, revenge, hospitality, the role of the *jirga* as a mechanism of tribal governance, and the idea that all men are entitled to equal say in decisions at the tribal level. U.S. forces, using the clear-hold-build approach to COIN conducted operations aimed at providing security, establishing Afghan government control in Pashtun tribal area, and gaining the support of the local Pashtuns. These operations violated Pashtun honor by killing family members and guests, thus engendering revenge. Efforts to increase the role of the Afghan central government were viewed as an affront to the traditional *jirga* that provides governance at the tribal level. Governance from afar runs counter the Pashtun belief that every person has a say in decisions at the tribal level because the decision makers in the central government are not subject to removal by a tribal vote. Development efforts, which sought to increase the legitimacy of the Afghan central government, were rejected because infrastructure increased access to remote tribal areas. Many of the Pashtuns relied on their isolation as a form of protection for their families and guests. Because protection of family and guests is a critical part of honor in *Pashtunwali*, any infrastructure that facilitated access for U.S. forces and the Afghan government was unwelcome. U.S. forces failed to understand key tenets of *Pashtunwali*, which had a direct impact on their ability to implement the clear-hold-build approach successfully.

Two approaches, both envisioned by U.S. Army Special Forces officers were evaluated as alternatives for engaging Pashtun tribes. Both approaches sought to build on existing tribal structures by maintaining tribal governance, and respecting *Pashtunwali* and its key tenants. The first approach relied on TETs to train and equip a TSF to protect Pashtuns from insurgents,

interdict external support for the insurgents, and ultimately integrate the TSF with Afghan security forces. Implementation would require adjustments in U.S. funding and troop assignment within Afghanistan. Along with a revision of the rules of engagement, higher acceptance of risk to TETs by senior U.S. commanders, and greater autonomy for TETs to act independently. Overall, the approach appears as viable and implementable in Afghanistan.

The second approach focused on development of the district level of government with the goals of providing governance and security to tribes living within the district. In addition, improvements to the rule of law, and economic and social development would be under the purview of the district government, not the Afghan central government. A one-hundred person DDT comprised of ISAF soldiers would facilitate these efforts. Implementation would also require modification to U.S. funding and troop assignments within Afghanistan. Risk is reduced due to the size of the DDT, but issues of integrating DDTs, ANSF, and tribal security forces require further analysis. Overall, this approach also appears to be viable and implementable in Afghanistan.

Recommendations

The author recommends that the two alternative approaches to current U.S. COIN operations be considered for implementation in Afghanistan. Neither approach requires an increase in troop strength or funding. Both approaches are sensitive to and inclusive of Pashtuns and *Pashtunwali* and because of this are more likely to yield positive results in dealing with the single largest ethnic group found in Afghanistan.

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